

Message Text

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DEFENSE FOR OASD/ISA FOR TIMBERLAKE

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TAGS: UK, MILI

SUBJECT: UK PRESS REPORT ON NIMROD

DAVID FAIRHALL, THE DEFENSE CORRESPONDENT FOR THE GUARDIAN, HAS A SHORT ARTICLE, ACCOMPANIED BY A LARGE PHOTO OF THE NIMROD MARITIME PATROL AIRCRAFT, IN THE 4 OCTOBER 1976 ISSUE OF THE GUARDIAN. THE ARTICLE APPEARS UNDER THE HEADLINE "NEW NIMROD'S QUIET APPROACH." WE QUOTE THE TEXT IN FULL.

QUOTE:

AN UGLY NEW VERSION OF THE RAF'S NIMROD MARITIME PATROL AIRCRAFT, BULGING WITH RADARS AT NOSE AND TAIL, HAS BEEN QUIETLY DEVELOPED AT HAWKER SIDDELEY'S FACTORY IN MANCHESTER AS A BRITISH ALTERNATIVE TO THE POUNDS 1,000 MILLIONS AMERICAN AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING PROGRAMME THAT WILL BE SUBMITTED TO NATO STAFFS THIS MONTH.

IN BOTH CASES THE BASIC IDEA IS TO PRODUCE A FLYING RADAR STATION THAT CAN "SEE" A LONG WAY AND
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DETECT EVEN LOW-LEVEL INTRUDERS -- LIKE THE SOVIET MIG

25 WHICH SLIPPED THROUGH THE JAPANESE AIR DEFENCES LAST MONTH TO LAND AT HAKODATE AIRPORT. THE AMERICAN PROPOSAL IS THAT THE USAF, THE RAF AND THE LUFTWAFFE SHOULD JOINTLY OPERATE A FLEET OF 27 AIRCRAFT, BOEING 707 AIRFRAMES WITH A BIG RADOME ON TOP AND COMPUTERS TO ANALYSE ITS SIGNALS INSIDE ON NATO'S BEHALF. TO MAKE IT POLITICALLY PALATABLE IN THE UK THE NATIONALISED BRITISH AEROSPACE CORPORATION (WHICH WILL INCLUDE HAWKER SIDDELEY) WOULD ASSEMBLE AND EVENTUALLY MAINTAIN THE FLEET IN THIS COUNTRY, WHILE GEC-MARCONI WOULD BE SUB-CONTRACTORS ON THE RADAR SYSTEM. THE COMPLETE PACKAGE IS KNOWN AS AWACS -- AIRBORNE EARLY WARNING AND CONTROL SYSTEM.

HAWKER SIDDELEY AND GEC-MARCONI ARE NOW OFFERING AN ALTERNATIVE PACKAGE WHICH DOES NOT, THEORETICALLY, HAVE THE SAME CAPACITY AS THE BOEING SYSTEM BUT WHICH, THEY CLAIM, HAS DISTINCT FINANCIAL, OPERATIONAL AND POLITICAL ADVANTAGES. THEIR PROPOSAL IS TO BUILD A NATIONAL FLEET OF PERHAPS 10 TO 12 NIMRODS INSTEAD OF THE PROBABLY SMALLER NUMBER OF AWACS AIRCRAFT THAT WOULD BE ALLOCATED TO THE UK AIR DEFENCE REGION WITHIN NATO.

TRULY COMPARATIVE COST ESTIMATES ARE DIFFICULT TO OBTAIN BUT IT SEEMS PLAUSIBLE THAT THE UK'S SHARE OF THE POUNDS 1,000 MILLIONS AWACS BILL WOULD BE BETWEEN 25 AND 50 PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE COST OF THE NIMROD PROGRAMME, AND WOULD GENERATE ONLY ABOUT A THIRD AS MANY JOBS IN THIS COUNTRY. GEC-MARCONI, FOR EXAMPLE, WOULD BE LOOKING FOR A PRIME CONTRACTING ROLE INSTEAD OF MERELY FABRICATING BITS OF THE SYSTEM TO AMERICAN DESIGNS.

INDUSTRIALLY, THEREFORE, THE CHOICE LOOKS STRAIGHT-FORWARD. BUT IN MILITARY AND POLITICAL TERMS THE DECISION IS MORE DIFFICULT. AWACS MAY BE MORE EXPENSIVE, BUT IT HAS THE GREAT ATTRACTION OF OFFERING A STANDARD NATO-WIDE AIR DEFENCE SYSTEM. IF BRITAIN DECIDES TO GO IT ALONE WILL THE AMERICANS BE INCLINED TO BLOCK THE SALE OF MILITARY HARDWARE THAT IS SUPPOSED TO BE MOVING IN THE OTHER DIRECTION ALONG THE "TWO-WAY

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STREET" -- SUCH AS THE HAWKER SIDDELEY HARRIER AIRCRAFT FOR THE US MARINE CORPS AND US NAVY? UNQUOTE

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